

March 26, 2012

Dear Members of the Families, Children and Seniors Committee:

I have two children with mental health disorders that are managed with medication. I have every expectation that they will become independent, productive members of their community.

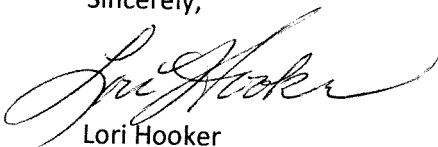
My children have a positive future only because my husband and I had the personal means to pay for their mental health evaluations where insurance coverage left off. Our portion of these evaluations was 30 times higher than any co-insurance or co-pay we have encountered for any other treatment, even the cardiologist! While I am extremely grateful that we managed to come up with the money to pay this, there are MANY families in Michigan that are not in a position to do so and their children are suffering the consequences.

Unfortunately, in my work I hear stories every day from families that do not have such a positive outlook for their children; families who have no insurance coverage for their child's disability or have reached the maximum lifetime mental health benefit. Lack of coverage means inadequate or non-existent treatment/medication for these children. For their families the harsh reality ranges from choosing between living expenses and medical bills, children who attempt to self-medicate with street drugs, and even being told that if they relinquish custody then their child will qualify for additional supports.

It is unconscionable that Michigan is one of only seven states in the US that do not mandate mental health parity. We need to give **all children** the diagnoses and treatment necessary for them to also become independent productive, tax-paying, members of their community.

I am urging you to support Mental Health Parity in addition to supporting coverage for children with Autism by including a Mental Health Parity bill with SB 414, 415, and 981.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lori Hooker".

Lori Hooker